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*****Prepared Remarks*****

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Good afternoon. Thank you so much for having me.

We meet today in difficult times. Our national economy continues to struggle. Millions are out of work. After three long months, the runaway well in the Gulf is capped, but the die has been cast and over 200 million gallons of oil need to be cleaned up to save one of the most delicate and important ecosystems in the world.

Next week we will commemorate the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Five years after, I stand here to thank all those who helped us survive, recover and rebuild.

To the first responders, to the millions of volunteers, the faith-based organizations, the American taxpayers, the cities that took us in, to the many nations of the world who came to our aid – the people of New Orleans thank you and offer our eternal gratitude.

But for both Katrina and the BP oil catastrophe, our future is not just about survival. It's about resurrection. It's about redemption. It's about getting this right.

We are not rebuilding the city we were, but creating the city we want to become.

The world, and we, deserve a better New Orleans.

It has been five years since Katrina stormed through the Gulf. Five years since the levees broke and drowned our city. Five years since flood waters from this man-made disaster devastated an area *nine times* the size of Washington, DC and displaced more than 1.3 million people. Five years and we still grieve for the 1,836 American citizens who lost their lives.

However, we come to remember and we must never forget that in the fifth year of the 21st century for four horrific days there was anarchy on the streets of America. This government failed to do its job and the people suffered.

It's a moment we should never forget, and one that we should never repeat.

We've had hell and high water, pain and salvation. We've survived Katrina, Rita, Ike, Gustav. The Great Recession and the BP Oil Catastrophe. The message is clear -- through it all, we are still standing unbowed, unbroken and ready to face whatever challenges come our way.

Not because we want to, but because we have to.

As horrific as they were, neither the BP oil catastrophe nor Hurricane Katrina created our problems; however, they did make them worse and spotlight them.

For example, crime has been unacceptably high for a generation.

We are grappling with an education system that was failing prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Our healthcare statistics have always been bleak.

We continue to lack affordable housing options.

When taking office, we were left with a multi-million dollar budget deficit.

We have huge infrastructure problems and the number of unlit and unpaved roads continues to mount.

Our battle for the heart, soul, and future of New Orleans is being waged on multiple fronts.

And, faced with these awesome challenges, one could easily turn and walk away. We do not have this luxury, and even if we did, it would not be in our nature.

Ironically, it is because of Katrina, the BP oil catastrophe, and the depth of our problems that New Orleans is uniquely poised to be the city that defines 21st century America. We are rebuilding from the ground up and attempting to set the standard for true community renewal in America. We are, in fact, the most immediate laboratory for innovation and change and our success or failure will be the symbol for America's ability to accomplish great things, or not.

Creating a 21st century city begins with making our city safe.

Upon entering office, we voluntarily entered into a partnership with the Department of Justice, and now have the full weight of the federal government behind our reforms of the police department.

But a long-term solution to the crime problem must start with providing an excellent education to the next generation of leaders. Since Katrina, we have been on the cutting edge of education reform.

In New Orleans, there is no longer a school system, but a system of schools that are held accountable, have high standards, focus on results, and engage families. Parents and students choose where to attend school and the schools that fail to live up to high standards are not allowed to stay open.

But the extraordinary thing about New Orleans public schools is the results. After decades of stagnation, test scores have risen markedly for the last three years.

New Orleans is creating solutions not only in criminal justice and education, but also for health care. One of the primary goals of federal Health Care reform is to usher in a new national primary care network exactly like the one currently operating in New Orleans.

Today, more than 87 neighborhood health clinics provide primary care to 292,000 residents. This access to care is unparalleled. It is affordable and focused on preventative care. It is rooted in the community. Best of all, it is readily scalable.

This is not a dream. This is not an unrealized plan for the distant future. This is health care in New Orleans, but it is a system that is still in peril. New Orleans is so far ahead of the curve, the funding we need right now is not available without further federal or state support. We cannot let them close.

Our network of neighborhood based health clinics is a small part of another bold new idea taking root in New Orleans. Place-based community development. This is a holistic approach to revitalizing communities where different public and private entities work together to cluster public amenities in close connection to surrounding multi-income housing.

When HUD Secretary Sean Donovan came to New Orleans last spring he went to Columbia Parc, a new mixed income development in a high poverty area of the city. The master plan for the surrounding neighborhood includes middle schools and high schools, an early childhood learning center, a recreation facility, library, playgrounds, retail, and green space all to service one neighborhood in New Orleans.

Columbia Parc is just one of many new place-based community developments underway. New Orleans is the largest urban planning effort in American history. Together we will rebuild revitalized communities that are safe, healthy and strong.

And we can do more – we can do so much more.

But, in order to get this done, we need to break down the silos that exist across federal, state and local agencies - both horizontally and vertically. We can't think of housing, health care, and education as separate, unrelated policy areas to be addressed in parts.

Instead policy makers need to look at the whole. Initiatives must be integrated and coordinated so all the money hits the ground at the same time and same place to produce something worthwhile.

As New Orleans begins to stand tall again, the people have rallied around our progress, finding common ground. A recent study shows that while we continue to struggle 77 percent of New Orleans residents believe that our city is headed in the right direction, markedly better than in years past. At the end of the day, we all have the same hopes – safe streets, excellent schools, good jobs. And the people of New Orleans walk together, locked arm in arm, to make our city a better place for all of us to live.

New Orleans is the coolest place in America. Passionate young people are streaming into the city, there has been a revival of volunteerism, and our vibrant spirit is on display every night in restaurants and jazz clubs across the city. Last year, we had the biggest Mardi Gras in history and it is just getting better. In the next four years, we are hosting

the Final Four, the BCS Championship, and the 2013 Super Bowl, where I predict the Saints will win their fourth Championship...in a row.

And the American people are with us. Since the BP oil catastrophe, President Obama has visited New Orleans twice and will soon join us for the fifth anniversary commemoration. From my first day in office, he and his administration have been key partners. Eleven out of fifteen Cabinet Secretaries have traveled to New Orleans in the last three months – most more than once. We are deeply appreciative of this support.

President Obama believes in New Orleans.

For every challenge we face, the opportunity and responsibility exists to change, to improve and to grow. But there is no challenge more complex nor pressing than the crisis of the coast.

On April 20th, the BP rig exploded and 11 men lost their lives in this tragedy. We still grieve for them today. And for nearly three months BP couldn't find a way to cap that hellish hole which spewed the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez disaster every four days. Over 200 million gallons of oil flooded into the Gulf and the effect will be felt for years to come. In the coming months and years, it is estimated that \$26 billion in economic output and 24,000 jobs will be lost, not to mention the cost of suffering families.

Everyone is affected.

From oyster processors like Sal Sunseri, to shrimpers like Brian Amos. From rig workers like Brett Gibbs to boat dock operators like Blackie Campo. And, it doesn't stop there. From hotel workers like Leroy Hawkins to waiters like Steven Rebert. From crane operators like Sean Ryan to tour bus operators like Ozzie LaPorte. And, it just keeps going.

The bad economy has already hurt local government and with the BP oil catastrophe further impacting revenue, teachers, police, fire, and other public services are all affected in this cascading and far-reaching crisis.

Our entire way of life and culture is threatened and every one of us knows what is at stake.

It is true that BP has finally capped the hole, and the immediate mission is clear. Capture the oil, clean the coast and compensate those impacted. But hear this America. BP and others are acting like this is the beginning of the end. It is not. We have no confidence in claims that much of the oil is gone. In fact, a NOAA sponsored study released on Tuesday found that 70-79 percent of the oil remains in the ecosystem.

This is the beginning of the beginning.

The disaster is yet another defining moment for the country and for New Orleans. We must reflect on the past and chart a new way forward.

Before the BP oil catastrophe, Louisiana's wetlands – America's wetlands - were already the fastest disappearing delta on the planet. For almost one hundred years, the Louisiana coast has been slashed and burned. Since 1930, over 1,900 square miles of wetlands have been lost. The area lost is the same size as the metro areas of Washington D.C., Houston, New York, Atlanta, Denver, and Los Angeles combined. Every year, 15,300 acres of coast evaporate into the Gulf. The same as losing the National Mall one hundred times over and over and over again. By the time I finish this speech, another acre of America will have vanished. We are committing coastal suicide while weakening our country.

The destruction of Louisiana wetlands is a direct result of human actions, not Mother Nature. Over the past 70 years levee and dam construction in Midwest and Plains states have stopped the natural flow of the river from depositing sediments that build up marshes and estuaries. Fertilizer runoff from farming in Iowa and Illinois creates a noxious cloud that kills everything in its path as it traverses down the Mississippi River. That runoff creates a 'dead zone' in the Gulf that is an astounding 7,700 square miles – larger than the size of Connecticut.

Most damaging, though, are the oil companies' 10,000 miles of canals and pipelines that snake through our marshes and bring oil and gas to onshore refineries in order to provide energy for the people of this country. The dredging for pipelines and canals allow saltwater from the Gulf to flood and poison our wetlands.

Now, when our children go fishing off Cocodrie, Delacroix, Lafitte, or Grand Isle even they can see the land has disappeared. Islands vanish, rows of trees are submerged, and waves lick close to our homes and our communities. It seems to have happened so quickly, but really it is generations in the making. The BP catastrophe has accelerated the destruction and heightened the awareness of how close to the brink we really are.

Times Picayune coastal expert Bob Marshall said that with 200 million gallons of oil in the Gulf, "Our coast is like a cancer patient who has come down with pneumonia." The pneumonia is serious, but "after the fever breaks, he'll still have cancer." And if all we do is clean up the oil, we will have cured the pneumonia, not the cancer, but we will have missed the bigger point and squandered the opportunity to make lasting changes to save our home and make our country strong again.

The people of the Gulf Coast face this reality every day. The rest of the nation needs to start supporting projects that can protect what we have left.

Americans have a stake in Louisiana's coast because, in a measurable way, the strength of the nation's economy depends on it. The U.S. economy is intimately linked to the Gulf Coast. For decades, we have been the tip of the spear in this nation's fight for our economic, our energy, and our national security.

Every year, Louisiana provides America with more oil and gas than the nation imports from Saudi Arabia. Americans consume 21 million barrels of oil a day. Only eight million is produced domestically – 25% of which comes from the Gulf of Mexico.

Not to mention that Louisiana is also home to five of the nation's top 15 busiest ports. We are the gateway for the nation's goods, with 460 million tons of cargo annually shipped down the Mississippi to the world and moved up the river to the heartland.

And let us not take for granted that Louisiana's coast is the nursery of the Gulf, home to the second largest fishing industry in America, annually accounting for 30% of all seafood consumed in the country.

So whether it is food, clothing, metals, or oil, the rest of America can rely on us to put food on the table, keep the lights on and gas in their tanks. Contrary to popular belief, gas does not come from the gas pump.

By focusing on higher short-term profits instead of long-term sustainability, we are greedily robbing resources from future generations. Decades of backroom political deals have left the coast defiled. Poor funding decisions by the state and local governments have added to its demise. The federal government is taking billions of dollars of revenue from our shores and redistributing it to other parts of the country. National environmental groups cluster on the east and west coasts, leaving local officials and environmental groups on the Gulf Coast to fend for themselves.

At the same time, BP has been incredibly irresponsible and negligent. They have arguably the worst safety record in the industry. They had no plan for capping the well or capturing the oil if a blowout preventer failed. And while the oil gushed in to the Gulf for 85 days, BP consistently dragged its feet to clean up and compensate, missed meetings, and seemed to treat the crisis with disdain. They just 'wanted their life back,' as if it were our fault. And, once BP is finished pillaging our coast for all that it is worth while shirking their responsibility; they are poised to, in my opinion, cut and run.

Throughout their \$50 million advertising campaign, BP vows "to make things right." But their words don't match their actions. If they really wanted to restore their reputation and reinvest in the Gulf community, BP would act quickly not slowly. They would move their regional headquarters to New Orleans, lay down roots in the community, and compensate everyone impacted. They would fund seafood testing and tourism marketing, and make substantial investments in restoring our coast. And it wouldn't have taken them over one hundred days to begrudgingly, and only partially, fund mental health initiatives for communities suffering up and down the coast. BP has still not responded to urgent requests for food, rental assistance and economic aid for victims.

Instead, BP's actions to date are of a company that is not truly sorry and is not trying to forge a new path. These decisions are made by a company whose corporate culture is focused on share price and limiting liability. Not by a corporate morality of stay and

invest. That is a shame. BP can redeem themselves and truly make things right, but they must act now. And we welcome, encourage, and invite them to do so.

But Louisiana refuses to be used, abused and then thrown away any longer.

It is time to change course, innovate, adapt, and hope for a better future. But hope is no substitute for a plan. In the short term, we must lift the moratorium on deepwater drilling. It is in fact possible to drill safely and protect our environment.

Energy consumption continues to rise but Americans don't want to drill in Alaska, off the coast of Florida, Virginia, California, or buy from foreign dictators. As we aggressively pursue viable alternative forms of energy, today, we can't rely on hydrogen fuel cells, wind, solar and bio-fuels alone. Currently, renewable energy sources can only fulfill 7% of our demand. We must drill safely and securely, in a way that sustains our energy needs, restores our coast, and provides us a bridge to the future.

Just this past week, Blade Dynamics announced the creation of a wind turbine factory that will create 600 new, green jobs in New Orleans. We are in the business of providing every type of energy.

And this is perfectly reasonable. It is not a zero sum game. We are not limited to "drill, baby, drill" or "stop drilling forever." We can do better. We must drill and restore.

And we know how to restore our coast. We know the importance of land-building diversions and sediment pumping systems. Some of the country's best minds have dedicated their lives to solving this problem. We have the way -- now we need the will and the resources.

According to the Clean Water Act, the federal government can fine BP up to \$21 billion dollars. The lion's share of these funds should go to the people of the Gulf Coast to restore the damage done. The Landrieu/Domenici Gulf of Mexico Security Act promises the Gulf Coast a fair share of oil royalties, which must be dedicated to restoring the coast.

However, the revenue sharing does not go into effect until 2017. Knowing this, Senator Landrieu has introduced the RESPOND Act, which would enact a fair share immediately.

But the entire industry has had a huge historical impact on the coast and must do its part to restore and maintain the very land that it uses to support its operations. An ethic of conservation and stewardship as old as the country itself must be renewed.

It is time for oil companies to step up and create a Conservation Fund to protect and conserve our coast. Other oil-producing nations have already set this precedent. How ironic that England, the corporate home of BP, takes 50% of revenue off the top from oil and gas profits. Brazil 60%, China 75%. And Nigeria 85%. The federal government's

take for Outer Continental Shelf drilling in the Gulf pales in comparison to these other countries. Oil and gas companies pay far less to drill here and have fewer regulations on restoring the land they destroy. Increasing royalty rates by a slight margin would have produced billions for restoration funding last year alone while maintaining our global competitive advantage.

Combine the penalties for gross negligence required in the Clean Water Act, fast tracking the RESPOND revenue-sharing, and an increase in royalty payments; the Gulf Coast would finally have the funds necessary to start restoring the wetlands and enable another generation to benefit from our natural resources.

This is not a partisan issue that divides us. Our way of life depends on sustainable drilling. We must preserve and protect what we have left. President Theodore Roosevelt, hero to both the right and the left, set the course, writing, "It is not what we have that will make us a great nation; it is the way in which we use it." It is time to stop exploiting our resources in a way that is economically hypocritical, environmentally ignorant, and morally wrong.

We all need the Gulf of Mexico, its resources, its delta region, its food and recreation, its culture now and forever. This is about preserving a way of life.

So now we come full circle. Katrina and the BP oil catastrophe are two sides of the same coin. They are both man-made disasters. They both could have been avoided. They both brought the Gulf Coast to its knees. They both cost people their lives. And they both have responsible parties side-stepping their obligations to solve the problem.

We can change. The legacy of Katrina and the BP oil catastrophe will be defined by our actions now. New Orleans is the best laboratory for change in the United States. The restoration of our coast will show the world how the government, businesses and people, acting in concert, can protect the Gulf Coast and turn crisis into opportunity. Frustration into motivation. Tragedy into triumph.

As we protect our coast, we will simultaneously protect all that we have built and hold dear inside our city and revitalize the urban landscape – creating better schools, preventative care clinics, housing opportunities, and new economic initiatives to promote sustainable energy.

We will do even better.

Imagine a New Orleans that is the vanguard of a diversified, interdependent, 21st century knowledge-based economy creating thousands of jobs and billions in economic revenue. Our children and grandchildren will work in the Gulf – but they will design turbines for hydroelectric power, invent new ways to control tidal flow to restore our wetlands and estuaries, experiment with cutting-edge ways to produce bio-fuel from algae, engineer carbon-neutral clean technology, and create world-class flood control devices.

This moment will define the 21st century and we cannot afford to fail. The challenge has been laid before us. It will test our resolve. The world is watching to see if America can still do great things.

But, we have been here before, faced challenges as large and as difficult. And we have overcome.

Again and again, our will has been tested.

And "if God is willing and da creek don't rise," we will find a way or make one.
